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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reassess conclusions drawn in 1975 about the prospects for survival of the Navajo language. A study done at that time uncovered evidence that there was increasing knowledge of English among Navajo children, although knowledge of English was highly, positively correlated to the level of isolation from Navajo speakers. As a result of a number of federal programs, most Navajo 6-year-olds now have very a limited knowledge of Navajo and a far better command of English. This paper tries to trace the language shift by reviewing data in published and unpublished studies. It then presents and weighs the various explanations proposed for the loss of this language. Efforts underway to reverse this language shift and preserve Navajo are also examined. It is concluded that prospects for the survival of Navajo are much bleaker than they were in 1975. In the interim, federal and state programs to promote English literacy have done much to spread and deepen its use among the Navajo. (Contains 58 references.) (KFT)

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Prospects for the survival of the Navajo language: a reconsideration

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Introduction

The phenomenon of a speech community ceasing to use a language or severely restricting the domains in which is used was early noticed in the term "dead language." Fishman (1964) was first to proclaim it as a field of study for the emerging field of sociolinguistics, and his major study of the state of language maintenance and loss in the U.S. Fishman (1966) provided a major set of data and an early effort to sketch out a theoretical model. In an article in the volume, Kloss (1966) reviewed the various factors that might be used to predict loss or maintenance of a language in a contact situation, and found that most of them were ambivalent in their effect. Only internally or externally imposed social and cultural isolation appeared to assure maintenance. Fishman himself summarized the study by characterizing upward social mobility of a minority speech community has a probable cause of language loss. In the large number of studies that have appeared in the last 40 years or so, boosted in the middle of that period by a general recognition that the majority of the world's languages are endangered (Hale, 1991; Krauss, 1991), studies of language endangerment (Crystal, 2000; Nettle & Romaine, 2000) and, more recently, of efforts to reverse language shift (Fishman, 1991, 2001) have still left serious gaps in the development of a model that will assist prediction.

Such a model is made inordinately more complex by the fact that sociolinguistics, as its name implies, is not an autonomous field, but one that studies language and language use in its full social (and therefore, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, demographic, religious, educational, ideological and other human) context.[1]

My concern in this paper is to reassess, some 25 years later, the conclusions that I reached on the prospects for the survival of the Navajo language (Spolsky, 1975).[2] That paper, based on two surveys of six-year-old Navajo children beginning school, showed evidence of increasing knowledge of English. It also provided, for some parts of the Reservation and especially for the border towns off it, the first reports of children whose knowledge of Navajo was considered to be nil or poor. It suggested that isolation was the main explanation of maintenance, showing strong relationships between the distance a community was from the nearest school and from the nearest off-reservation town and the proportion of Navajo school beginners knowing English. In the years that followed, reports appeared of continued language attrition. Whereas in 1970 some 90% of the Navajo children in boarding schools had no pre-school experience of English was common, by 1990 the situation virtually reversed, with six-year-old Navajo children beginning Head Start or kindergarten said to have very little or any knowledge of the language of their people.[3]

The paper will first try to trace this language shift by reviewing data in published and unpublished studies. It will then move on to presenting and weighing the various explanations

that have been proposed for the loss of the language. It will conclude by reviewing efforts being made to reverse the shift.

Background[4]

The Navajo Nation occupies an area of about 25,000 square miles in the Southwestern United States; portions are in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The 1990 United States Census reported 219,198 Navajos, 148,983 of them living on the Reservation. Population density in 1993 was estimated at six people per square mile. Whereas once most Navajos subsisted through sheep, livestock and farming, now most income is from wages (about half), general assistance (a quarter), or social security (15%). Unemployment is high. Over half the population is below the poverty level. Most people live in small houses forming small family camps and separated from others by miles. Few homes[5] have plumbing; water is generally hauled. More recently, small clusters of about thirty houses with electricity and water are starting to be built typically not far from a school or other government service, producing new kinds of living patterns. Many Navajo live in the rapidly growing small towns on the Reservation or on off-Reservation towns. About a quarter of the Navajo population has completed high school, but only 2% have college degrees. About 60,000 children are in school, and 4000 in Head Start programs.

There has been a major change in the past thirty years, as Lee & McLaughlin (2001) summarize it:

> Only the most isolated and remote communities remain unconnected to the reservation highway system. Telephones, cell phones, electricity, cable and satellite television, and solar-powered twelve-volt electricity systems that support radio, television, VCRs, the internet, and the like are all widely available. Trading posts, which used to serve as information hubs in the communicative economies of reservation communities, have been replaced by 7-11 convenience stores owned by off-reservation, non-Navajo, English dominant interests. Navajos' intermarriage to non-Navajos has increased dramatically. Simply put, the Navajo Nation is no long isolated from the rest of the world.

These changes have also been associated with the serious loss of younger Navajos' knowledge and use of their language.

Current state of the Language

While the Tribal Council of the Navajo Nation is on record as favoring the maintenance of Navajo-English bilingualism through the use and teaching of both languages in schools, implementation of this policy is blocked by the fact that the Tribal Division of Education has no authority over the curricula or teaching practices of the various school systems.[6] The Division of Education does however have direct (if somewhat filtered) authority over the Head Start programs that it administers directly under a contract with the Federal Government. In these programs, spread throughout the Navajo Reservation, it is able the carry out the Navajo immersion curriculum required in an Executive Order issued by the Navajo Nation President (W. Holm, 1996: 404). In these programs, all instruction (during a school day limited by the pressure of long school bus routes and the detailed schedules requiring attention to providing food and

health care for the children) is given in Navajo. These Navajo curricula now assume that children start with little or no knowledge of the Navajo language,[7] and start by teaching basic vocabulary and the grammatical structures needed for the routine of the Head Start program and for the content that is to be covered.

At the same time, the Navajo Nation remains widely Navajo speaking. Navajo is still reported to be the main language spoken between adults in the family context, while Navajo and English appear to be used equally when speaking to young people and outside the home (Lee & McLaughlin, 2001). While local chapter[8] meetings continue to be conducted mainly in Navajo, tribal governance (council and committee meetings, judiciary proceedings, and regular staff work) is increasingly in English. The biggest change, Lee & McLaughlin (2001) report, has been the loss of natural intergenerational transmission of Navajo.

Lee (1999) has been the latest to document these effects by gathering data from 200 Navajo adolescents from five reservation schools. Adults at home still speak mainly Navajo and some English, but speaking to the adolescents or outside the home, Navajo and English are more or less equal. The young Navajos themselves also use both languages about the same. Their impression is of an increase in English around them, but they themselves think they use more Navajo as they grow older. Half of them took part in traditional of Native American Church activities, where they reported hearing mainly Navajo. But they also reported hearing more English in these contexts than when they were younger.

I have already cited Platero's evidence of decreasing Navajo use among young children. Parsons-Yazzie (1995) bears this out, identifying six main reasons parents give for not speaking Navajo with their children:

1. They commonly use English anyway.
2. Children spend their time in settings where English is more common and has higher prestige.
3. The children are ambivalent about or ashamed of Navajo.
4. It helps children at school if their parents speak English with them.
5. Knowing Navajo is not important
6. English is associated with academic success. The only Navajo-speaking adults at school are in more menial occupations.

There is, Lee and McLaughlin conclude, cause for alarm.

Schools and Contact with English

The anthropologist Sapir who was one of the first to make extensive studies of Navajo language and oral traditions remarked how little the language had been influenced by several hundred years of contact with Spanish. English was to have a much greater effect. The Indian Bureau opened the first boarding school for Navajo children at Fort Defiance in 1882, with the goal of integrating the various Native American tribes in a homogenous group with a single language (English) and open to U.S. control (McCarty, 1998:31). Discipline was severe, and

there was Navajo opposition to boarding schools culminating in violence at Round Rock when in 1892 attempts were made to carry children off to school (Aberle, 1966:39).

Many stories bear witness to the traumas of those experiences. Among the texts collected by Sapir (1942) and his student Harry Hoijer in 1929 is an account by one Navajo of his early schooling and his satisfaction at learning English:

> Twenty years have passed since I came among [the Americans]. When I was eight years old, I came among them at the place called Fort Defiance in order to learn the American language. It is a very difficult language.
>
> It is not pleasant for one who first comes (to school), for boys are very mean to me.... When I became bigger, it came to be that they did not treat me so. And then when I had learned the American language, I was pleased. So now I can talk to you by means of it. At Fort Defiance I spent nine years going to school. And then I went also to Albuquerque. There I spent three years. At that point I was through with school. (436-7; told and translated by John Watchman.)

The narrator worked for three years as a blacksmith, and then returned to the hooghan and busied himself with sheep.[9]

Bennett (1964) who was born in the mid-1920s talks about the frightening visit of the superintendent from the boarding school at Toadlena who came to take the girls to school. In discussions reminiscent of Russian Jews afraid of conscription into the Czarist army, their mother anguishes over which child should be sacrificed to the law.

McCarty (2000) has collected stories about the impact of the early boarding schools, built in Fort Apache, Fort Wingate, Phoenix, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe (all peripheral to the Navajo Reservation) and in other Western States. The military discipline (army posts turned into schools), the poor and inadequate food, the forced labor, and most of all, the strict banning of Navajo and enforced speaking of English all have left an indelible memory of schooling in the early years. Well into the 20th century, punishment for using Navajo continued.

School was thus established as the principal weapon of the linguistic colonialism in the government's efforts to control and civilize the Navajo. Being forced to go away to boarding school interrupted many aspects of traditional Navajo life. Children who were away at school missed the traditional grandfather's tales told only in winter. Girls missed the correct timing for the traditional Kinaaldá puberty ceremonies (Frisbie, 1967: 83. They lost thus the opportunities provided for linguistic enrichment.

Only the absence of universal schooling and the failures of curriculum and teachers slowed the process of Navajo language attrition and loss. Day schools built during the Roosevelt administrations at least allowed children to return to Navajo speaking homes at the end of the day, but the scattered traditional residential patterns and the absence of roads meant that day schools too needed dormitories.

In the 1930s, a government program of forced stock reduction destroyed the poor economic base of Navajo life, making the effect of the economic depression even greater and building lasting enmities within the communities over the implementation of the stock reduction.

Destruction of the local economic base also greatly encouraged the willingness to seek of work off the Reservation.[10] During the war, funding for Navajo schools was reduced and many schools were closed. Only in 1950 was a development program funded to try to provide education for all Navajo children. By 1960, the number of children in schools had doubled, reaching six times the number of Navajo children enrolled in 1939. The bulk of these children were in boarding schools on (13,000) or off (6000) the Reservation. Another large group (about 7500) were in the elitist public schools build on the Reservation for children of BIA employees, traders and missionaries. These schools admitted only the most highly qualified Navajo children. Other children were in mission schools or day or trailer schools.

Traditional residential patterns and the existence or quality of roads had an important influence on the type of school a Navajo child would attend. For cultural and economic reasons, Navajo families generally lived in a *hooghan* miles away from their neighbors. As long as most children lived, according the official criterion for boarding school enrolment, more than a mile and a half from the nearest road along which a school bus serving a public school went, boarding school was the most common. Essentially, this meant that starting at the age of 6, Navajo children would leave home for a non-Navajo environment. Physically, a high wire fence surrounded the school compound, consisting of classroom and dormitory buildings for the children and a small cluster of separate houses for the English-speaking teachers who staffed the school. Until the 1970s, there were only a handful of Navajo teachers working in Reservation schools. The result was English-speaking teachers attempting to communicate with and educate Navajo-speaking pupils, pupils who came from traditional homes where only Navajo was spoken. The study of six-year-olds in 1969 and 1970 (Spolsky, 1970; Spolsky & Holm, 1977) captured this pattern. Some 90% of the children attending BIA boarding schools were reported by their teachers to have known no English before they came to school.

The public schools were however different. The first was established at Fort Defiance; in the 1950s, others were added at Ganado, Crownpoint, Kayenta, Shiprock, Tohatchi, Tuba City, and Chinle. Attended by the children of English-speaking employees and teachers (and so often located alongside a boarding school to cater for its staff), they admitted only Navajo children whose English made them capable of handling an English only curriculum. By the 1970 survey, most children in these schools were reported to know at least some English by the time they started school. The children living off the Reservation in towns like Gallup of course knew the most English. There, many of the Navajo children were reported in the 1970 surveys as knowing little or no Navajo.

The 1969-70 studies produced evidence of two factors accounting for the spread of English, both directed related to residential pattern and proximity (or better, accessibility) to a source of English, which was either a town off the Reservation or a school. Public schools, whose children lived relatively close by) had much more English than boarding schools (even when physically side by side) whose families lived much further away.[11] The studies gave a vivid and sensitive picture of the penetration of English into the Navajo Nation as a result of access to work and English off the Reservation and as a result of the development of English-using schools. At the same time, they presented only an over-simplified view of the complex factors leading to language shift. They showed the changes of access to English, either at work or shopping or at school, but do not show the attitudinal, motivational or ideological changes that

accounted for a situation where most Navajo parents seem superficially unconcerned that their children are growing up not speaking the language, or at least powerless to take action to resist language loss.[12]

Ideology and loyalty

Fishman (1966) was one of the first to analyze the notion of language loyalty, although latterly he has made his concern more specific by talking about efforts to reverse language shift (Fishman, 1991, 2001). The concept is related to language or linguistic ideology (Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998; Silverstein, 1979), which might be defined as set of beliefs of about how language should be and how it should be used. In a pioneering typology of language use, Stewart (1968) proposed four key factors: autonomy, standardization, vitality, and historicity. Fishman (1970) reinterpreted these as attitudes or beliefs, so that for him *vitality* became not the fact of natural intergenerational transmission, but the belief that parents and caretakers should speak to young children in this language. In all considerations of language maintenance and loss, this issue becomes the key factor. Our question then becomes not what were the changing *conditions* that gave Navajos access to English, but were the changing *attitudes* that led so many Navajos to believe that it was better for their children to speak English.

From the answers of Navajo adults to questions about this matter, the most common references are to their own or other people's school experiences, the way they suffered or were punished for not knowing English and for speaking Navajo, and the desire to spare their own children this discomfort.[13] While the first generation suffers, it at least had some chance to acquire the heritage language before or outside school. When future parents have been successfully co-opted to supporting the imposed language, the critical feature of natural intergenerational transmission of the language is fatally compromised.

Reinforcing the negative reinforcement of punishment, there was of course also the prestige of English. Other references make clear the vastly greater status of English. In the schools, English was the language of the principal and the teachers; only the cleaning staff and the cooks and the drivers could speak Navajo with the children or their parents. English was also the language of the rapidly intruding outside modern world, of the nearby towns and of the cities where relatives had sought work, of literacy, and, as it was introduced, of television and computing. What purpose could be served in resisting its spread, or even in attempting to maintain Navajo alongside?

Literacy

Literacy deserves more careful consideration, for it is associated with the second critical factor in Stewart and Fishman's list, *standardization* (the existence of a standard form and a writing system). The main effect of schooling for the Navajo has been an acceptance of English literacy alongside (at least until recently) Navajo oracy (Spolsky & Boomer, 1983; Spolsky & Holm, 1973). Public oral discourse (Tribal Council and Chapter meetings, Tribal courts, radios) continues to be in Navajo (see below), while public written activities (the minutes of the meetings, the records of court sessions, the Tribal newspaper) have always been and still are in English.

This may be illustrated by the case of a Navajo woman elected to serve as secretary of her local Chapter. Her English (she had been raised partly off the Reservation and her father was English-speaking) was adequate enough to write down the minutes of the meeting, although she needed help from her husband to make sure she hadn't missed anything. But she then needed to spend hours before the next meeting improving her spoken Navajo and practicing before she could "read" (that is, translate into acceptable Navajo) the minutes aloud at the next meeting. I somewhat casually referred to this as special kind of diglossia, with one language for speaking and another for writing. But the issue is much more complex, for there were and are uses of literacy in the vernacular.

Young (1977) has reported on his work with Morgan and Harrington in developing what is fairly considered to be a highly successful orthography for Navajo in the late 1930s (W. Holm, 1996). Before that, systems had been created for scientific linguistic use by Sapir and by Haile. The new system was immediately adopted for three important functions – for schools (in a limited way), for government propaganda (about stock reduction and about the war effort) and by the Protestant missionaries working on a translation of the Bible. It was not taken over for other official functions, for officials were either non-Navajo speaking Anglo-Americans or English-literate Navajos. Nor was it seen to fill any indigenous tasks – for most Navajos, literacy remained an alien skill for alien functions.[14]

At the same time, it must be noted that Navajo literacy also provides a chance for resistance. (McCarty, 2001) presents a vignette of Navajos who acquired literacy for religious purposes (see next section), but went on to use it, when they became bilingual teachers, for indigenous goals. The existence of an accepted orthography, the high level of the dictionaries and grammars recording the language, and the respectable body of printed material provides a basis for the continued teaching of the language in schools and at the tertiary level.

Religion

For many languages, religion served as a major force of language maintenance and spread. The existence of sacred texts in Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Arabic played an unquestioned role in the continued knowledge of these languages. [15] Among the Navajo, who may be associated with one or two of the four religious groupings – traditional Navajo religion, Native American Church, a variety of Christianity, and Mormonism, the matter is more complex, for none are unalloyed supporters of the language. In traditional Navajo religious ceremonies, use of Navajo remains important. Navajo and English are used in the Native American Church. English is more used in Christian church services, but some have Bible reading and sermons in Navajo (Lee & McLaughlin, 2001).

Traditional Navajo religion

Traditional Navajo religion, with its carefully prescribed rituals conducted by highly trained "singers" or "medicine men," its long traditional poems and ceremonies, remains on the face of it a major force for language preservation. The rituals and ceremonies are in Navajo, and form the principal body of Navajo verbal tradition (Reichard, 1963; Spencer, 1957; Wyman,

1957). Singers acquire their knowledge by several years of apprenticeship to another singer, often a paternal kinsman (Aberle, 1966:45).

The singers who are guardians of the tradition express some concern that it might be changed or lost. Frank Mitchell, whose conduct of a Kinaaldá (girl's puberty ceremony) in Chinle was recorded by Frisbie (1967), explained to some people present why he thought it was all right for non-Navajos to record the event:

> That is the reason that these people who are non-Navaho are interested. They are recording to preserve these things. You younger people are not sincere in trying to learn it to carry it on in the future. So it is a good thing white people record it to preserve it for us. You ask why they are here to take pictures, make records, and to preserve the whole ceremony. In the future, someone may be interested in inquiring about it; then he will be able to see it. (Frisbie, 1967: 53).

Ceremonies continue to be conducted in Navajo, but, I was told, occasionally patients respond in English. But the effect is more complex. Because of the sacredness, there could well be resistance of the kind Frank Mitchell was answering to committing the texts to writing.[16] As a result, traditional Navajos are not automatically supporters of the teaching of Navajo language and literacy in schools, institutions that they tend to distrust. A second negative effect is that the association of Navajo language and culture with traditional religion leads many Christian Navajos to object to teaching the language in school. As a general results, efforts to maintain traditional Navajo religious practices do not lead automatically to Navajo language preservation.

Christian Missionaries and Churches

In the case of Protestant missionaries in Polynesia in the 19th century, one major result was the rapid indigenization of literacy in the vernacular (Spolsky, Englebrecht, & Ortiz, 1984). Among the Navajo, the effects were more complex and less favorable. Austin-Garrison, Casaus, McLaughlin, & Slate (1996) include a number of interesting accounts of the way that Catholic and Protestant and Mormon missionaries introduced Navajos to literacy and encouraged in them an interest in the language. The existence of the Navajo Bible and its use of the standard orthography were cited as a major reason for not revising the writing system in the 1970s. Positive as this effect has been, it is often more than counter-balanced by the strong opposition already alluded to expressed by some church members to the teaching of Navajo in school for fear that it might be associated with the teaching of non-Christian traditional Navajo religious views and beliefs.[17]

Many early Christian missionaries appeared to share the common belief that Navajos would need to give up their language to be modernized. The Roman Catholics at St Michael's were a marked exception, developing an orthography at the beginning of the 20th century and publishing the first Navajo dictionary (Franciscan Fathers, 1910). Father Berard Haile, who worked on the Reservation from 1930 to 1960 and published a good deal of traditional material, was considered by Navajos to know their language and culture remarkably well:

> Father Berard Haile is a good example. Was he a proselytizing Christian? Who knows? By the time he was well into studying Navajo language and documenting Navajo ceremonial life, he may well have had so much wisdom about Navajo ways that he might have been more Navajo than Anglo. (Austin-Garrison et al., 1996: 356).

Other missionaries however were assumed to use Navajo and literacy only in order to convert Navajos who would then give up their language and ways of thinking.[18] Faye Edgerton, whose work Wallis describes, was one of those missionaries who believed in the importance of learning Navajo and of developing a version of the Bible in it.[19] She started active work as a translator in 1944 and spent the next ten years, with advice from the Wycliffe linguists and the collaboration of Navajos and other missionaries, working to complete the translation of the New Testament. One important decision she made was to switch from the difficult semi-phonetic orthography developed by the Franciscan Fathers and continued by Edward Sapir to the new "government" alphabet developed by Robert Young and William Morgan. This choice, as Holm (1996) points out, was a critical factor in standardizing Navajo – the agreement of Church and state produced a powerful partnership in teaching Navajo literacy.

As McLaughlin (Austin-Garrison et al., 1996; 1987) has demonstrated, church-related literacy in Navajo could easily develop into an empowering tool, permitting Navajos to take even greater control of their modernization. In Tonga, vernacular literacy combined with indigenization of the churches (Spolsky et al., 1984) played an important part in preserving the language. In the decade after the publication of the full translation of the New Testament in 1954, there was evidence of a boom in Navajo literacy.

But because of the critically serious gap between Christianity and traditional Navajo religious beliefs, the overall effect of the Christian churches was to work against language maintenance. The quandary was expressed in the 1970s by Navajo Christians who said they could accept bilingual but not bicultural education. Regularly, it is members of Navajo Christian Churches who oppose the teaching of Navajo in school for fear that it will bring with it the teaching of Navajo religious practices and beliefs.

The Native American Church

The third major religious force, the growing Native American Church of Navajoland is now including, I am told, Navajo songs in the all-night peyote ceremonies. Originally, the songs were in languages that Navajos did not understand, but the prayers were all in Navajo. The Peyote religion, "the most popular, and one of the most durable of all the religious movements created by American Indian groups suffering from the effects of domination by American society," (Aberle, 1966: 3), reached the Navajos in the 1930s. By 1950, when Aberle was employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to help them decide whether to accede to a request from the Navajo Tribal Council to wipe out the cult, it had reached some 20% of Navajos and continued to grow.

As Aberle describes the Church in the 1950s and 1960s, its appeal came for a number of reasons. The all-night ceremonies are less rigidly prescribed than the Navajo traditional

ceremonials and the training of the leaders is less demanding. There are differences in ideology and belief, reflecting what Aberle sees as the depressing social and economic effects of white domination and especially of the stock reduction campaigns. Prayer, it appears, is more spontaneous, and may be in English.

It is the language issue that Aberle (1991) now cites as one of the main reasons for the appeal of the Native American Church.

> Navajos today want to maintain their identity. Religion is one way of doing so. Although traditional religion is an obvious way to tie oneself to a Navajo or Indian identity, it faces two problems: a decline in the number of chanters, which will reduce the number of chants and the availability of ceremonies; and the loss of the Navajo language among the young. Transmitting Navajo religion without the language in which its ideas are embodied will be difficult. Today peyotists refer to themselves as traditionalists and respecters of Navajo ceremonies. They see an alliance between Peyotism and Navajo ceremonies, contrasting them with Christianity viewed as alien. (Page vii).

Lacking a rigid language ideology, the Native American Church has been able to adapt itself and take advantage of the shift to English, and so encourage it.

Mormonism

As a large part of the Navajo Reservation spreads into the State of Utah, contact between the Mormons and the Navajos has been continual. Some of this involved missionary activity, possible even before 1978 when Church doctrine was amended to permit persons with dark skin into the priesthood. Mormon missionary activity among the Navajos took a new direction in the 1950s with a plan to have Navajo children adopted as foster children by Mormon families. This, it was hoped, would remedy the fact that many earlier conversions had turned out to be superficial and impermanent. The linguistic effect of this policy was of course to encourage shifting to English.[20] As a whole, Mormonism too is likely to have been a force for the shift to English.

Political organization

Often, language revival and resistance activities have been integral parts of nationalist attempts to gain political independence for an ethnic group. Irish and Hebrew at the beginning of the 20th century, Québec, Catalonia and the Basque region, Maori in New Zealand all involved simultaneous political and linguistic action. It is worth considering how this might influence the Navajo situation.

There is no clear answer about the nature of Navajo political organization before white contact. Young (1978) considers that the institution of Headman (*naat'áanii*), a local man (or woman) "of high prestige, eloquent and a natural leader capable of governing by persuasion" (page 25) has always existed.[21] The Spanish at the end of the 17th century attempted to appoint a single Navajo governor, following the model they imposed successfully on the Pueblo tribes, but

this had little effect. Spaniards and, later, Americans were mistaken in their belief in the coercive powers of the headmen with whom they tried to make agreements or treaties.

Young (1967) sees the Navajo attitude to coercion as basic to understanding the cultural conflict that arose after contact:

> Navajo culture does not have a heritage of coercive religious, political or patriarchal family figures, and in the Navajo scheme of things one does not usually impose his will on another animate being to the same extent, and in the same ways as one does from the English point of view. (7)

It is, he notes, very difficult in Navajo to express notions like "ought to, must, duty, responsibility." This clearly had a major effect on the development of Navajo political organization under white pressure:

> The Navajo parent is likely to ask a child if it *wants* to go to school, rather than issue a mandate to the effect that it *must* go. By the same token, coercive laws are distasteful from the Navajo point of view, and Tribal leadership has long preferred persuasion to force, even in applying 'compulsory' education laws on the Reservation.
>
> As a result, acceptance of the Anglo-American police and court system, based as it is on the principle of compulsive behavior – the enforcement of coercive laws – has still not been comfortably accommodated within the Navajo cultural framework, despite the fact that the Tribal government supports a system of Tribal courts and a well-equipped police force. (8)

The imposition on the Navajo of a system of governance suitable to the needs of the U.S. government on the one hand and the cultural preferences of the Navajo people on the other was a complex matter. The government wanted a local system that would maintain order and be able to give away mineral and land rights but not at the same time demand independence.

The Americans did no better than the Spaniards had. After the military campaign of Kit Carson in 1863, most Navajos were taken into captivity in Fort Sumner where a plan was developed to divide them into 12 villages each headed by a chief appointed by the Army. This principle, Young says, was the basis for the model proposed by the Special Indian Agent after the Navajos were permitted to return to Navajo Country. In fact, for the next decades, there were various patterns of recognition of local chiefs and ad hoc councils of headmen called by the government agents. At these meeting, Navajo leaders would freely express their opinions, but all power remained with the US government representative, and the tribe appeared from outside as a community without an organized government. This situation lasted well into the 20th century.

From the beginning, language became a source of power, as interpreters were needed to convey information between Navajo-speaking chiefs and council members and English-speaking Indian agents. The status and influence of Chee Dodge, while in his early twenties, appointed in 1883 by the Indian Agent as Chief of Scouts and a year later as Head Chief of the Navajo Tribe, was premised on his being "the only man known who can transmit the speech of an ordinary English speaking person into fluent Navajo" (Young, 1978:44). [22]

At the same time, as (Young, 1967: 16) notes, interpreters were underpaid and selected with formal testing of their abilities. It was assumed any school child, any janitor or cook could serve as a reliable interpreter between parents and school authorities or between Navajo patients and Anglo-American doctors.[23] George Boyce, who joined the Indian Service in 1938 and later became director of Navajo schools, reported on the problems in the stock reduction campaign:

> Not one of the government administrators spoke or understood the Navajo language sufficiently to know what the interpreter may actually have said in attempting to translate such ideas into Navajo... Beatty suspected that the Navajos who were being used as interpreters were not sufficiently skilled in English to translate accurately. (Boyce, 1974: 34).

But, as Neundorf (1987) has shown, the key position that skilled interpreters, since Chee Dodge, have played in negotiating contacts between government agencies and Navajo political bodies served as a stepping-stone to power for Navajos who were bilingual.[24] I suspect that there were very few who would reach the level of 3, defined as minimal proficiency for professional activity. It is interesting to note that this expert on Navajo language and culture ended his bureaucratic career assigned to the office responsible for Pueblo Indian affairs. As a result, Navajos who were fluent in Navajo and English played a key role in communication between Anglo-American rulers and their Navajo subjects.

The pressure for formalization of Navajo political organization came from the mining companies who sought in the early 1920s some way to obtain Navajo approval their exploitation of mineral rights. To handle the legal problems produced by issues of whether the authority was local or regional, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1923 drew up regulations establishing a Navajo Tribal Council, a body with which the government could negotiate agreements (Young, 1978: 59).[25] The Council had neither legislative nor executive power, but was there to discuss any issues brought before them by the government. Chee Dodge was chairman of the Tribal Council established in 1923, and it had twelve delegates and two interpreters.

One task the Bureau had for the Tribal government was to approve the sale of Navajo mineral and land resources.[26] A second task was to take responsibility for the stock reduction policy starting in the 1930s (Young, 1978: 71) and continuing for thirty years (Aberle, 1966: 52-90), which, Aberle says, produced enormous suffering and led to depression and disillusionment. Not surprising considering its key role as a tool of US policy in these areas, Tribal government remained a center of disagreement and dispute.

During the 1930s, there was continuing dispute over the constitution of the Council, and finally, in 1937 a Constitutional Assembly met, appointed itself Tribal Council, and prepared a draft constitution defining the organization and powers of a self-governing Tribal authority. Instead, a year later, the Department of the Interior drew up rules for an elected Council the powers of which were not defined. All control of money, including Tribal funds, remained in the hands of the government. A movement for self-determination developed again after the war, when, with the help of an appointed Tribal Attorney, the Council began to gain greater control over Tribal funds.

In all this long process, a key sociolinguistic effect was the growing role of English. As noted the first chairman of the Council was selected for his bilingualism. The council in its early years could only meet at the call of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to discuss topic he decided in the presence of Federal officials for whom all debate needed to be translated into English (Young, 1978: 69). From early on, there was preference for council members who had gone to school; of the twelve original delegates selected for the 1933 Council, only two had not gone to school. While council members were then generally bilingual, it was for a long time accepted that debates be conducted in Navajo and translated into English for the Federal officials. [27]

By the late 1980s, however, there had been a change and the Tribal Council now favors code-shifting. Neundorf (1987) notes that "so many Councilmen are used to code switching informally, and it takes some effort to stay entirely within either English or Navajo for extended excursions (163)."[28] Neundorf concluded: "Today in Navajo society about everyone is bilingual, but still the power belongs to those who are fully coordinate bilingually and biculturally" (1987:183).

Changes in a limited industry community

In two recent papers, Lane (1999, 2000) has been studying identity and sociolinguistic changes in maritime communities undergoing a drastic change as a result of major alterations in their single industry, fishing, because of global influences setting quotas for environmental protection. These communities typically confined to serving a single economy have evolved their own local patterns of life and identities. The changes in economy have, she has shown, had marked effects in changes of identity and local loyalty. The Navajo Nation is certainly not maritime (traditionally, fish was not considered appropriate food, and its consumption was one of the major changes attributable to boarding schools), but looking over its economic history, it can clearly have been considered at one stage to be an economically limited industry community, as sheep and shepherding provided the major source of wealth and led to a pattern of living that by the early 20th century characterized social and economic organization.

Realizing this, it is not at all far-fetched to consider the stock reduction plan of the middle of the 20th century as a central factor in the collapse of Navajo traditional life and a strong contributor to the loss of Navajo identity and language. The arguments put forward by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, like the arguments put forward by those setting fishing quotas, were based on the need to maintain environmental stability. The strict imposition of these principles on a people with limited ability to resist applies as well to the case of Navajo sheepherders as it does to the Danish fishermen that Lane studied.

The effect of the changes of economy with the reduction of sheepherding was demographically important. Once children were no longer needed for looking after stock, they could be allowed to go to school. Once a family no longer needed to live as close as possible to the range where its stock grazed, they could move to the growing semi-urban settlements at the agency headquarters, or to a town off the reservation where they could be employed, or even to one of the small settlements being built along the roads.

The loss of Navajo language can then be traced to a misguided government economic policy – by attacking the economic basis of Navajo life, the policy of stock reduction led to major demographic changes, with a shift from scattered residence patterns to a semi-urbanization that supported and encouraged shift from Navajo monolingualism to Navajo-English bilingualism as a first stage, and to Navajo English monolingualism as the next.

The media

In the section on literacy, it has already been noted that while there has been some vernacular literacy, the key pressure from literacy has been towards English. Radio for a long time provided a significant counter-force. For many years, the small FM radio stations that surrounded and dotted the Reservation broadcast almost entirely in Navajo, announcing the Country Western music that was their staple, and presenting all news and advertisements in Navajo. Only in recent years has a tendency been noticed to present certain announcements and news (most recently, basketball results) in English, in recognition of the growing number of young Navajos who do not easily understand Navajo. Television is of course almost entirely in English, apart from an hour or two of local broadcasting of Tribal Council sessions.

Schools and reversing language shift

Mention has already been made of the major influence of schooling and education on the destruction of tradition and language among the Navajo. In this section, however, I wish to attend not to the general effects of Bureau and State public schools, but on the failure of the independent Navajo schools to correct the trend. One thinks naturally of the major force that schooling was in the revitalization of Hebrew and Irish and Welsh, and of its growing role in the revival of Maori in New Zealand and Yiddish among Hasidim in Israel. In each of these cases, while the mainstream schools continued to work in a different direction, these community-controlled independent schools had an ideological commitment to language.

Thirty years ago, the first schools on the Reservation came under the control of the local communities, usually by contracting with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Now, Lee & McLaughlin (2001) note, some 10% of schools have this status. In some of them, there was an early commitment to Navajo language, and both Rock Point and Rough Rock schools, the pioneers of community control, developed a program where the teaching of Navajo literacy preceded English and where Navajo served as language of instruction at elementary and secondary levels (W. Holm & Holm, 1990; Rosier & Holm, 1980). In spite of the evidence of their academic (as well as Navajo) success, the model did not spread (A. Holm & Holm, 1995). Recent observation of these schools makes clear that the Navajo programs in them are declining and weakening, unable to stand up to the pressures of accreditation and funding and external curriculum demands.

Lee and McLaughlin (2001) sum up the results. Only 10% of Navajo pupils receive any Navajo language courses, almost always presented as supplemental programs (in Arizona, schools may teach Navajo to fill the foreign language requirement). Teaching at the high schools is even weaker, with isolated teachers receiving little support for their work (Lee, 1999).

Schooling, then, the original instigator of English, has failed so far at least to support reversing language shift activities.

Prospects for the survival of the Navajo language

Looking at the situation a quarter of the century later, it seems that Spolsky (1975) may well have been over-optimistic about the prospects for the survival of Navajo. The enthusiasm that accompanied the development of community schools, the growth of the Navajo Teachers Association and its transformation into the Tribal Division of Education, the burgeoning of bilingual and Navajo medium education, the major campaign to train one thousand Navajos as teachers, seems to have faded in the face of the relentless pressure of changing economic and demographic circumstances. In spite of the presence of token Navajo political and educational autonomy, the educational policies of the Federal government and of the four State governments have continued to work towards the shift from Navajo to English that reflects the general tendency in the United States as a whole.

Spolsky (1975) explored the effect of access to English on its spread in the Navajo Reservation. Even without the upward social mobility that Fishman (1966) had postulated as a major force in the shift from indigenous or immigrant languages to English, the power of English to spread, as elegantly described in de Swaan (1998a, 1998b), enabled both by improvements in the roads and by the invasion of television, might seem to be enough to account for the language shift that we have traced. The demographic changes that resulted from the successful attack on sheepherding can also be seen as a force leading to a massive increase in contact with English.

The model that de Swaan has proposed holds that a language like English is a kind of good with two important properties: it is available to all, and it becomes more valuable for more people who possess it. The issue that de Swaan's model does not seem to tackle satisfactorily is what prevents English from completely swamping the languages with which it comes in contact. Why for example, does Dutch survive when nearly 80 percent of the population of the Netherlands are said to be comfortably fluent in English? To account for this, we need to look for the ideological or political or religious or nationalist or cultural or ethnic forces that encourage speech communities to resist language shift to. In the Navajo case, this appears to have been very weak. The values of westernization and schooling, introduced and encouraged by the U.S. Army and the Federal Government and the Christian missionaries, were early adopted by many individual Navajos, and the economic and political success led to growing value for westernization and anglicization. While many of the Christian missionaries made use of vernacular literacy as a method of access to the Navajo, literacy largely maintained its function in introduced domains: church, school, government. As a result, vernacular literacy never managed to overcome the usefulness and appropriacy of English literacy. In spite of providing a basis for remarkably fine linguistic scholarship, and the potential (ultimately unrealized) for bilingual education, vernacular literacy too was co-opted into a force for language shift to. Seemingly protected by its isolated geographical position and by the formal recognition of its autonomy as a Nation, the Navajo people was denied any real control of the one institution, schooling, which can play a central role in a campaign to reverse language shift.

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[1] For an earlier presentation of such a model, see Spolsky, 1978; Spolsky, Green, & Read, 1976).

[2] I am, as will become obvious, indebted to conversations with and comments from a number of my friends, some of them my former students and all of them my teachers, who have helped in the preparation of this paper. I would welcome corrections and comments on this paper.

[3] Platero (1992) found that over half of the Head Start children he studied were monolingual speakers of English. Holm (1996):404 estimated that "only about half of Navajo five-year-olds now enter Kindergarten speaking any Navajo at all. Less than a third of these are considered by their teachers to be reasonably competent speakers of five-year-old Navajo."

[4] This section is based on Lee & McLaughlin (2001).

[5] Many families have a hooghan for ceremonial use; in isolated areas, people live in them.

[6] Boarding schools continue to be under the control of the Federal government though the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Public schools come under the aegis of local district school boards that are themselves answerable to four different State educational systems (Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah), each with its own set of regulations. Charter and community schools also have their own boards. All schools are strongly influenced by regional and national accreditation agencies and the pull towards state and national standards.

[7] Closer analysis will show, I suspect, that while the children do not speak Navajo, their knowledge of English is far from adequate. Phonology is the most obvious feature showing that they are speaking a Navajo variety of English, with the result that when they do start to learn Navajo they have very little problem with pronunciation.

[8] Chapter is the term used for local community associations. See below.

[9] Sheep, it seems, make up a good conclusion to a Navajo biography: Old Mexican finishes up the account of his life that he gave to Dyk (1947) with the statement "Well, I haven't anything else to tell. Nothing more that is interesting. All the rest is sheep." (168).

[10] Some 3700 Navajos joined the armed services when the war began in 1941; more than 10,000 went to work in war-related industries in peripheral towns or in other States.

[11] The 1969-70 survey was crude in many ways. The data were collected from school teachers, few of whom knew Navajo, who were asked to classify their six-year-old children as they were at the time they began school[11] according to their proficiency in Navajo and English, each on a simple three-point scale (knew it well, knew some, knew none). We did check the reliability of the judgments by asking a number of teachers to fill out the same form a couple of months later (Spolsky, 1970) and the validity by sending trained judges to test a selection of classrooms (Spolsky, Murphy, Holm, & Ferrel, 1975). The scores for schools were averaged, and the average for the various categories calculated. In addition, we estimated the accessibility of the school to the nearest town off the Reservation by multiplying the road distance with a factor representing the quality of the road. The correlation between English score and accessibility was significant. For one school, we did a further comparison, by calculating the accessibility of each child's home and correlating this with his or her English score. Again the correlation was significant.

[12] McCarthy (personal communication) notes that parents do express concern, but feel helpless to reverse the shift. Perhaps this relates to the notion of authority (see later in this paper).

[13] This reaction of parents to the forced imposition of another language in schools, reported regularly in the cases of peripheral minority languages in Europe or in the cases of immigrant languages, probably most closely fits the term "linguicide" coined by Skutnabb-Kangas (1981).

[14] An exception proving (that is to say, testing) the rule was one isolated community studied by McLaughlin (1987) where literacy introduced by the church and school was spread and used

for other purposes as a result of developing local control and community empowerment. Similarly, in a number of school related literacy programs in the 1970s and 1980s, many individuals developed literacy, some of them forming a tiny cadre of Navajo writers. But as a general fact, it is reasonable to say that literacy has been a force for English and language shift.

[15] In the case of Hebrew, it was the religious and related educational system that preserved the language for some 1700 years, providing a strong basis for modern revitalization (Spolsky, 1991a, 1991b). The Arabic of the Qur'an remains a unifying factor for the many countries to which Islam spread. But, conversely, the religious spread of a language could just as easily work against indigenous languages, as evidenced by the way Arabic replaced Aramaic in the Middle East.

[16] Frisbie (1967) reports on two singers who were willing to record some of the Kinaaldá songs, but not songs that were part of the Blessing Way Ceremony which were "too special."

[17] Reichard (1963:45) points out the fundamental conflict between Navajo and Christian beliefs about the purpose and end of human life. For the Navajo, it is a state of non-personal and non-individual perfection in a spiritual union with nature, which is directly opposed to the Christian view of individual survival and resurrection as a result of faith or works. As Navajo religious ceremonies express this concept, it is understandable that most churches are deeply resistant to anything that preserves Navajo religious observance or belief.

[18] "Even mission schools shared the mentality of the times, which led to the prohibition of the use of the mother tongue and the exaltation of the white man's language. Christianity and progress were often equated with embracing Anglo-American speech and dress. This superficial brand of conversion often result in disillusionment and disappointment for the missionary and frustration for the Indian." (Wallis, 1968:37).

[19] She came to the Navajo Reservation in 1924 as a Presbyterian missionary. Portions of the Bible had been translated earlier, but there was no continuing translation work under way when in the 1940s, she discovered the Wycliffe Bible Translators, a group of missionary-linguists who conducted the Summer Institute of Linguistics and were involved in Bible translation all over the world.

[20] Some serious concerns about the Mormon position on Native Americans, whether or not they are to be classified as the "Lamanites" who, according to Mormon beliefs, may enter the priesthood, may have been behind the excommunication for heresy in 1989 of George P. Lee, a Navajo who had been in the adoption program and in 1875 was called to the First Quorum of Seventy, an exceptionally high rank in the Mormon church.

[21] There is however dispute about the nature and size of the *naachid*, a regular (or occasional) gathering of local (or tribal) headmen for religious or political or war purposes.

[22] Ability to speak with government officials was commonly treated as evidence of power; thus, as (Dozier, 1966) reports, the chief of the Tewa-Hopi bilingual village Hano was mistakenly assumed by the President to be the senior rather than the most despised of the Hopi village chiefs who came to visit him in the early 1900s.

[23] Some of this explains the misconceptions about Navajo knowledge of the human body shown by the Cornell health study and later exposed by Werner's medical atlas.

[24] Robert Young is one of the few BIA administrators who probably had what the Foreign Service Institute would grade as Level 5 competence in Navajo language.

[25] Each of the six Superintendencies into which the reservation has been divided was to elect delegates, who in turn were to elect a permanent chairman and vice-chairman. A few years later, a further step was taken with the institution of local meetings of what were sometimes called Chapters or Livestock Associations or Farming Associations, with elected officers, that became a forum for discussion of local issues. While there was no formal connection by the mid-1930s, the 100 community associations had become an important element in tribal organization.

[26] Whose interests were generally served is suggested by the recent court decision (No. 93-763L February 4, 2000 in the US Court of Federal Claims) finding that, as reported in *The Arizona Republic* on February 8, 2000, "Reagan administration Interior Secretary Donald Hodel 'violated basic fiduciary duties' to the Navajo Nation when he killed a plan to boost royalty payments from Peabody Coal Co."

[27] Robert Young (personal communication) told me that Council members would complain if any speaker mixed the two languages.

[28] The session of the Council I attended in 2000 showed a pattern of switching. Formal parliamentary statements would be made in English ("Referring to section 5B of the bill tabled yesterday"), but many speeches would then move in culturally sensitive and rhetorically Navajo presentations, with full and appropriate kinship references. Only bilinguals can follow this kind of debate; those who do not speak Navajo (like the Tribal Legal Advisor) must depend on the simultaneous interpretation now provided through headphones.